

N^o 5

The DEIST confuted upon his own Principles :

O R, A
RATIONAL DEFENCE
O F
R E V E L A T I O N,
From its own intrinsic
USEFULNESS and EXCELLENCE.

I N A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at KELVEDON, *May 7, 1754,*
At the Visitation of the Rev. Dr. Moss,
Arch-Deacon of COLCHESTER.

By NATHANIEL BALL,
Vicar of GREAT TEY, and Master of the
Free-School at CHELMSFORD.

To which is added,
An APPENDIX, containing Remarks on Lord
BOLINGBROKE's Objections to Revelation; design'd
as a general Answer to all Deists, and to expose his
Lordship's fallacious Reasoning, gross Misrepresenta-
tions of Scripture, and frequent Self-contradictions.

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T H E P R E F A C E.

THE truth of revealed religion is founded on two sorts of evidence, commonly called external and internal. External is that of history, miracles, and prophecy. Internal is the usefulness and excellence of revelation, the tendency it has to promote the happiness of mankind both here and hereafter. The former evidence, tho' incontestably strong when fairly examin'd, requires some application to see its force. The latter is obvious to all capacities, and, if duly attended to, must I think make the holy scriptures appear in a most amiable light. To inspire just sentiments of their intrinsic dignity and excellence, and to vindicate their divine character against the aspersions of a late noble writer, is the design of the following sheets.

An honest inquirer after truth will always exercise modesty, candor, and impartiality in the course of his inquiries: a true gentleman will never forget good breeding and good manners. But Lord Bolingbroke has forfeited his title to both these characters,
as

as may appear from his own writings, and the judgment of every sensible unbiass'd reader. He has plainly shown himself a haughty, over-bearing declaimer, rather than a candid and fair reasoner.

I am sensible many far better advocates have appeared in defence of revelation. If an inferior writer adds to the number, he may plead this apology—The same subjects will always bear different lights—And there is a diversity of tastes in readers, which cannot so well be suited as by a diversity of writers. Different forms of dress please different eyes; and that which excites the attention of one man, may be overlook'd by another. If this performance afford nothing new, the reader, 'tis hoped, will find the scriptures truly represented and rationally defended. And this is the way to stop the progress of deism, which owes its chief strength to the misrepresentations and wrong defences that are made of revelation, and not to any real want of evidence.

 E R R A T U M.

Page 46. line 22. dele [✓] or, and put it in line 23. before *bo- dies politic.*



2 TIM. iii. 16, 17.

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,
for correction, for instruction in right-
eousness : that the man of God may be
perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good
works.*



HE former part of these words,
as they stand in our English
translation, seems not to carry
in them any settled meaning.
Whether we consider them alone, or
as related to the context, they appear to
have either no determinate signification,

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or

or a signification too low and trifling to be expected from an inspired apostle. Let us examine this a little.

In the verse preceding the text, we find St. Paul paying a compliment to Timothy for his early acquaintance with the holy scriptures ; and from thence he takes occasion to describe the dignity and usefulness of scripture in general. “ All
 “ scripture (says he) is given by inspira-
 “ tion of God, and is profitable for doc-
 “ trine, for reproof, for correction, for
 “ instruction in righteousness: that the
 “ man of God may be perfect, tho-
 “ roughly furnish’d unto all good works.”

By the word *scripture* our apostle does not mean the writings of Moses, or those of the prophets, or any *particular part of the revelation then receiv’d*; but he means divine revelation in general. This is evident from the context. In this sense therefore the term *scripture* implies a book or scheme of doctrine given to
 man

man by the inspiration of God. Consequently when St. Paul says, all scripture is given by inspiration of God, he says no more than, *every writing that is given by inspiration of God, is given by inspiration of God*, i. e. every revelation that comes from God, comes from God; *everything that is true, is true*.—What a wise observation is here? will sceptical men say. Where is the sense of talking in this manner?—Every thing is what it is—who knows not this?—Does not this interpretation therefore appear jejune, and unworthy the character of a sacred messenger of God?

To remove this difficulty, with which the text is embarrass'd, we may observe, that the passage will admit of a different *reading*, according to which a more rational explication may be given of the words than what our English version represents. The different reading is made only by leaving out the particle *καί*, in the original; for which there is sufficient authority. So that, instead of say-

ing, “ All scripture is given by inspira-
 “ tion of God, *and* is profitable for doc-
 “ trine &c.” it ought to be read, “ All
 “ scripture *which is given* by inspiration
 “ of God, or *all divinely-inspired* scrip-
 “ ture is profitable for doctrine, for re-
 “ proof, for correction, for instruction
 “ in righteousness; that the man of God
 “ may be perfect, thoroughly furnish’d
 “ unto all good works.”

In support of this reading, our learned *Mills* informs us, the copulative *και* is omitted by many authentic manuscripts. And the *Polyglott* instructs us, that the vulgar Latin, the Syriac, and Arabic versions, all give the same interpretation of the words which I have mention’d. *

As a further confirmation of this we may add, that there are certain canons

* Versio Syriaca, *Siquidem omnis Scriptura quæ per Spiritum Dei scripta est, utilis est, &c.*—Versio vulgata Latina, *Omnis Scriptura divinitus inspirata, utilis est, &c.*—Versio Arabica, *Quælibet Scriptura divinam sapiens aulam, utilis est, &c.* Vid. POLYGLOTT.

of criticism by which the various lections of scripture may be determin'd. In one of these canons it is said, *That reading is to be rejected which makes the writer speak any absurdity.* As this seems to be the case of our English version, I presume you will the more easily admit the reading already mention'd.

From what has been said, the attentive hearer will observe, that this explication of the text makes our apostle speak a sense sublime and noble. He intimates, that the divinity of scripture is to be judg'd of by the useful tendency it has to promote the perfection of human nature, to furnish men with all the qualifications of wisdom and goodness. This suggestion naturally leads me, in the sequel of this Discourse,

1st. To shew that no writing can be of divine inspiration which has not those marks of it St. Paul mentions in the text; or, in other words, that no book, or scheme of doctrine, can come from
God,

God, which does not tend to instruct and improve mankind in wisdom and goodness.

2dly. I will endeavour to show, that the revelation we enjoy has that useful tendency.

3dly. I will urge some motives to stir us up to the study of it.

1st. I will endeavour to show, that no writing can be of divine inspiration, which has not those marks of it St. Paul mentions in the text; or, in other words, that no book, or scheme of doctrine, can come from God, which does not tend to instruct and improve mankind in wisdom and goodness.

Not to enter into the debate, what the precise idea of inspiration is, whether the sense alone, or the very words and style of scripture are likewise inspired; 'tis, I think, sufficient that God so directs, or assists the sacred writers, as *to enable*

enable them to give a just account of his will.
 And what is truly inspired may be judg'd
 of, from its useful tendency to make
 men wise and good.

Miracles and prophecies are external evidences of scripture: its useful tendency, the internal. Without this we should have no reason to admit miracles and prophecy. Both together amicably combine to ascertain the truth of divine revelation, and to make the man of God perfect, as art and nature conspire to make an accomplish'd poet. The nature of my text leads me to consider principally the internal excellence of scripture, to show that no book can come from God which does not tend to instruct and improve mankind in wisdom and goodness.

The truth of this proposition will appear very evident, if we duly reflect upon the moral attributes of the Deity. For as God is a being of consummate wisdom and goodness himself, 'tis natural to think,

he delights in communicating these perfections to all reasonable beings. And as the happiness of human creatures depends upon their *goodness*, if God desires to make men *happy*, he must certainly desire to make them *good*. Whatever method therefore the divine being thinks fit to use, in order to promote the happiness of mankind, it will always be correspondent to the ideas of wisdom and goodness. Consequently, when he vouchsafes to reveal his will to men, his design can be no other than to promote true wisdom and goodness amongst them: for without these qualifications it is impossible for any reasonable beings to be happy.

To say, that a wise and good being does not desire all intelligent creatures to be wise and good, is an express contradiction; because it supposes the Deity to be wise *to no end*, and good *to no purpose*: which is, in effect, the same thing as to say he is neither wise nor good at all. If therefore the Divine Being, when
 he

he reveals his mind to men, reveals it for any end at all, he must reveal it for a *wise* and *good end*; and consequently the end of all revelation, and of all inspired scripture, must be to make men *wise and good*.

To suppose otherwise is to represent the Deity as acting in direct opposition to his own nature; which is the highest absurdity that can be imagin'd.

Now what can be more becoming the divine nature, what more likely to make men wise and good, than such a revelation as is *profitable for doctrine*, i. e. which teaches men what is proper for them to know; *for reproof* (it may be render'd for *confutation*) that is, to remove absurdity and error; *for correction*, or reformation of manners; and *for instruction in righteousness*, that is, improvement in all manner of virtue. By these means *the man of God*, taking that expression for one of the sacred order, will be perfect himself, and qualified to make

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others

others so: or if we understand it in a general sense, *the man of God*, i. e. every godly man, or every true lover of God, will have all the means necessary to promote the perfection and happiness of his nature.

Having thus consider'd the internal characteristic of divine revelation in general, arising from *its useful tendency to make men wise and good*, I proceed,

II. To show that the revelation we enjoy has that characteristic or useful tendency.

Waving all critical inquiries into this subject, I shall confine myself to such remarks upon the usefulness of scripture, as lie obvious to every capacity.

If we take a general survey of the Old and New Testament, we shall find there is one uniform design carried on throughout the whole, and that is, to bring mankind over to the practice of pure religion

ligion and virtue.—To diffuse proper sentiments of the creation and providence of God, to preserve mankind from heathen idolatry and superstition, to encourage them to trust in him who alone is able and willing to protect and make the world happy, to rectify the errors and reform the practices of foolish and wicked men ; all this is the current strain, and ultimate design, of the revelation we enjoy. How various soever the methods have been which Providence has used in revealing himself to men, he has always acted consistently with this design : and is not this a design worthy the Divine Being ? Is not this, in the highest sense, *dignus vindice nodus* ?

Every one who reads the Bible with common attention, even out of any translation, must, I think, plainly perceive this account of it to be true. But the truth of it will more particularly appear, if we consider *the doctrine, the history, and the promises*, contained in the revelation God has given us.

1st. As to the *doctrine*, does it not breath the purest dictates of wisdom and truth? The commandments deliver'd by God to Moses are a complete system of morality. For they contain, in terms most agreeably concise and perspicuous, the two grand duties, of love to God, and love to mankind, which are the sum and substance of all true religion. Add to this the refin'd maxims of wisdom represented in the Proverbs of Solomon. These contain the best rules of behaviour, in all stations of life, from the highest monarch down to the lowest peasant. And to mention no more of the sacred penmen of the Old Testament, see with what artless eloquence the prophet Micah describes the salutary doctrine of divine revelation; "He hath shew'd thee, " O man, what is good; and what doth " the Lord require of thee, but to do " justly, to love mercy, and to walk " humbly with thy God?" *Mic. vi. 8.*

In the New Testament we find the same doctrine more copiously explained,
and

and more strongly enforced. For a testimony of this, let us appeal to that inimitable sermon of our Saviour upon the mount, and to the fine lessons of morality which St. Paul has taught us, together with the other apostles.

From hence it is evident, that the revelation which God has vouchsafed to give us, is directly calculated to improve mankind in wisdom and goodness.

2dly. If we consider the *historical* parts of scripture, we shall see the same design, of propagating wisdom and goodness, is perpetually carried on. For every matter of fact related there represents to us some example of virtue to be imitated, or some instance of vice to be avoided.

The characters of sinners and just men are impartially described. The blemishes and vices which are sometimes apt to intermix and sully the virtues of the best men, are faithfully represented, with a view to excite the circumspection or repentance

pentance of the reader. It is worthy our particular notice, how affectingly that beautiful machinery which our Saviour uses in his parables exposes the follies of mankind, and with irresistible softness of persuasion charms us into virtue.

3dly. From the *promises*, as well as from the *doctrine* and *history* of scripture, we may plainly see the design of it is to promote wisdom and goodness. This will appear beyond contradiction, if we consider that these promises, whether they respect the good things of this life, or those of the next, are tender'd to us only upon condition of our being good and virtuous. Thus the fruitful land of Canaan, which flow'd with plenty like a spring of water, was promis'd to the Israelites upon this very condition, that they would behave themselves wisely and piously in the sight of God. And those Israelites who neglected to fulfil this condition, instead of inheriting the promis'd land, were doom'd to wander up and down for forty years, amidst the gloomy horrors of the wilderness.

wilderness. And as to that future happiness which the Gospel has brought to light, this is all along proposed as an encouragement for men to follow after truth, peace, and righteousness, *to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.* Which plainly proves, that the design of the Christian revelation is to promote the practice of true wisdom and virtue. And this brings me,

IIIIdly and lastly, To urge some motives to stir us up to the study of divine revelation.

You have seen how strongly the sacred writings recommend the practice of religion and virtue. And upon this alone every one knows the perfection and happiness of man depends. If therefore we desire to be happy, what better method can we take to promote our happiness, than by applying ourselves diligently to the study of the holy scriptures? The noble precepts they inculcate, and the glorious reward they propose, for the encouragement of virtue, (which reward

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is no less than immortal happiness) both these bespeak their intrinsic excellence, and justly intitle them to the highest esteem. Even deists themselves, upon their own principles, are oblig'd to admit and embrace whatever tends to promote virtue and happiness. And are the holy scriptures intitl'd to no esteem upon this account? have they no tendency to promote the good of mankind? Suppose they are not the immediate offspring of heaven, do they not teach doctrines worthy of heaven?—Will any one say they afford no light in the way to happiness? Whatever difficulties attend the external evidence of miracles, prophecy, and general tradition, this *internal* evidence, this useful tendency of scripture to make men wise and good, is clear and obvious to all capacities, and should therefore make the external marks of revelation more easily believ'd.

Again; In reading the lively oracles of God, we shall find a large field of matter to exercise our ingenuity. The maxims

ims they inculcate will increase our knowledge, at the same time that they help to regulate our conduct. And the facts they represent are diversified with such an infinite variety of pleasing circumstances, as may strike our fancies with the highest admiration and delight. Whatever difficulties present themselves, upon a transient view of the scriptures, the diligent inquirer will soon overcome them; and when, by intense application, he discovers any new light, he will feel a joy dart suddenly upon him, like that of the labourer when he happens to find some hidden treasure by digging in the mines. This will elevate his conceptions of the word of God, and be an additional motive to his improvement in knowledge and virtue.

Are we admirers of eloquence and loftiness of speech? we shall find the sacred writers to be no ways inferior to the best Roman or Grecian orators for beautiful elocution. What a wonderful sublimity,

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strength and elegance of diction do we meet with in the book of Job? all the charms of poetry, and all the powers of eloquence, seem to unite themselves in this book, to illustrate the dignity of the Divine Being, to assert his Almighty power and Providence, and justify the ways of God to man.

In the writings of the prophets, there is such majesty and pomp of expression, such bold figures, such sublimity of thought, such fire, such energy, such moving pathos, as no Heathen writers can parallel. And where shall we find any authors superior to the evangelists, for that plain simplicity of style becoming an historian?

Let not the scholar therefore sit perpetually poring over his Tully, or Demosthenes, and think the sacred scriptures unworthy his attention. Men of all ranks and degrees may find not only an agreeable amusement in reading the Bible, but likewise abundance of advantage in the important

important concerns of religion and virtue. As therefore (to borrow St. Peter's words) " we have such a sure word of prophecy, we shall do well if we take heed to it, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts." 2 Pet. i. 19.

It is our peculiar province, who are more immediately devoted to the service of God, to attend to this instruction, to study the Divine will, and *rightly divide the word of Truth*. Let us be unanimous in this endeavour; and, however we may differ in smaller matters, let us never forget the weightier points of the law. And let us not call one another by the opprobrious names of deists and infidels, merely because we happen to differ in some points of civil polity, or systematical divinity. Let us remember we are all the servants of one master, *Jesus Christ the Righteous, who is the author and finisher of our faith*. Let us study his doctrine with impartiality and diligence; and de-

send it with truth, candor, good manners, and good humour. The neglect of this hurts the cause of revelation, and gives infidels too just occasion to censure and triumph. The progress of deism increases by such means, which indeed is owing more to the *misrepresentations* and *wrong defences* of Christianity, than any want of evidence to ascertain its truth.

To conclude ; let us not only study the doctrine, but follow the example of our blessed Redeemer, who was a perfect pattern of truth and righteousness, benevolence and mercy, meekness and humility. And, to help us in this, let us join our humble prayers to God with our best endeavours ; which we cannot better do than in the words of an excellent collect in our liturgy, *viz.*

“ Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning ; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest

gest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ."



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A P P E N D I X.



T appears from the foregoing discourse, that *intrinsic excellence* and *real usefulness* are necessary marks of all divine revelation ; that the revelation we now enjoy has these marks, being directly calculated to promote the peace and happiness of mankind, both here and hereafter. This self-recommending excellence should, one would think, entitle the holy scriptures to some esteem, to a candid and serious
exa-

examination at least. But the generality of deists look upon them with an air of contempt, with a levity and boldness ill-becoming the importance and dignity of the subjects they treat of. The late Lord *Bolingbroke*, in his posthumous writings, has distinguish'd himself by a superiority of disdain for the Bible and its advocates, as well as by a superiority of genius. The contemptuous manner in which he opposes revelation, and his undistinguishing indignation against the clergy, must, I think, be look'd upon by all impartial and candid readers, unbecoming the nobility of his character, unworthy a man of sense, or of common good nature. Why must the whole order of divines be indiscriminately styl'd *orthodox bullies*? and why must that great and good Man, that humble, modest, and candid divine Dr. *Clark* be call'd an *audacious and vain sophist*? and in various places *unjustly abused*? Should we suppose he fail'd in his attempt to demonstrate the being and attributes of God *à priori*, he certainly meant well; *et si non tenuit, magnis tamen excidit ausis*. All the e-

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vidence *à posteriori* still remains in its full force. This Dr. Clark ingenuously allows, and bespeaks and justly deserves the reader's candor. But neither his greatness, nor goodness, neither his profound learning, nor uncommon parts and engaging humility, could guard him against Lord Bolingbroke's spleen.

Our noble Lord, it must be owned, is a very fine writer. Perspicuity and elegance of diction, and oftentimes the most noble, just and delicate sentiments, shine forth with peculiar brightness throughout his works. But, I think, he writes in a loose unconnected manner, without order or method, and sometimes spins out the same thought into a vast profusion of elegant words: he dwells too long upon it, then leaves it, resumes it again improperly, and upon the whole may be reckon'd *ingeniously prolix*.

His way of reasoning seems to me very fallacious and inconclusive, and in some places he is inconsistent and contradicts himself. The state of the argument

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with

with regard to his chief objections against revelation, I take to be this: Revelation has been misrepresented and corrupted. This Lord Bolingbroke takes advantage of, and would therefore have us believe, there is no truth in revelation at all. Let the justness of these observations be determined by his own writings, which speak for themselves. The judgment I have ventured to pass upon them, I shall endeavour to support, in the sequel of these remarks.

The external evidence of divine revelation, arising from history, miracles and prophecy, has been fully made appear by many ancient and modern writers. Among which the most learned and ingenious Bishop Clayton in his answer to Lord Bolingbroke, and that genteel, candid, and sensible dialogue just publish'd by the Rev. Dr. Warner, deserve particular notice. My principal aim is to recommend and vindicate the *internal evidence* of Scripture. This kind of evidence Lord Bolingbroke rejects as *unnecessary*, nay, as *impertinent* and *profane*. Hear his own words:

words: " External and internal proofs
 " of authenticity are both necessary in
 " examining profane history; but when
 " the question is about the word of God,
 " internal proof is unnecessary—or im-
 " pertinent and profane. If we could
 " suppose the authenticity and divine ori-
 " ginal of scriptures destitute of sufficient
 " external proof, this deficiency would
 " not be supplied by all the skill of those
 " who pretend to discover, by their supe-
 " rior penetration, the internal proofs.
 " If the authenticity and divine original
 " of them be, on the contrary, suffici-
 " ently establish'd by external proof, it
 " is both *impertinent and profane* to pre-
 " tend to confirm Divine testimony by
 " shewing that there is reason to believe
 " it true."*

By internal evidence his Lordship ex-
 pressly means, " the character of the
 " doctrines contain'd in revelation, whe-
 " ther worthy or unworthy of a divine
 " original."†

* Vol. II. 8vo. edit. p. 212.

† Ibid. p. 268.

Now, according to this definition, is it unnecessary or impertinent to examine whether the laws of God are founded upon reason? Can it be call'd profane to shew that the Divine commands are in their own nature useful, and directly productive of human happiness? And if this be the character of the doctrines of revelation, do they not evidently demonstrate a Divine original?

If internal evidence is not to be minded, how shall we be able to distinguish juggling tricks from real miracles? Is the mere pomp of Power to be solely admired in the operation of supernatural events, and no regard to be paid to the reason why they are produced? Does the Deity love to make an idle parade of his omnipotence, and act without any wise or beneficial design? Or is he afraid to submit his faultless productions to the inspection of reason? Has he given us a faculty of judging between right and wrong, between pernicious and useful doctrines, and does he forbid us to exercise that faculty? What absurdity therefore

fore can there possibly be “*in confirming Divine testimony, by shewing that there is reason to believe it true?*” And is it not astonishing that a nobleman of Lord Bolingbroke’s ingenuity and learning should call this *rational* examination, this internal evidence of scripture, *unnecessary, nay, impertinent and profane?*

But his Lordship seems to take peculiar pleasure in depreting the internal, as well as external evidence of revelation. “A maxim, he says, has been establish’d in theology, which is, that miracles themselves are not to be admitted as proofs of a Divine original, unless the cause for which they are wrought appears to be good; and therefore not till the doctrines they attest have been examin’d.”*

This maxim his Lordship roundly asserts to be a false maxim; and he tells us, the authority of common sense will justify him in saying so. But let the meanest

* Vol. II. p. 213:

peasant, or the most illiterate mechanic, determine by the mere light of common sense, whether the maxim is not indisputably true, and whether even in the terms his Lordship has express'd it, it is not a self-evident maxim, carrying conviction along with it, and standing in no need of a formal proof. If there was occasion to prove it, one might ask, whether the Divine Being exerts his power merely for the sake of shewing his power, or for the sake of doing good? If for the sake of doing good, the cause for which miracles are wrought is to be inquired into, and the doctrines they attest examined. If the case be otherwise, the bulk of Mankind must be inevitably exposed to all manner of fraud and imposture; and any person well-skill'd in natural philosophy and the powers of mechanism may captivate the illiterate vulgar, and, by imposing cunning tricks for miracles, make them believe any doctrines however absurd. Experience tells us, this is frequently the case in Roman catholic countries. And therefore the maxim which guards against these

these delusions is not only a true, but an honest protestant maxim, and founded upon the strictest reason and common sense.

The noble Viscount still goes on to vili-
fify the internal evidence of scripture.
“ Internal proofs (he says) divines boast
“ of are often the wildest hypotheses of
“ imagination.”* And again; “ If ex-
“ ternal evidence is proved, internal seems
“ little necessary.—But our divines exhort
“ to examine the internal evidence, tho’
“ if the result of that examination is not
“ strictly conformable to the doctrines
“ they teach, they *damn* us for exami-
“ ning.”†

Divine revelation has nothing to do
with the wild hypotheses of human fan-
cies. And if the licentious fallies of Lord
Bolingbroke’s imagination had been pro-
perly restrain’d by true judgment, we
should have seen less pompous declama-

* Vol. II. p. 214, 215.

† Ibid. p. 268.

tions drop from his pen, and more solid argument. The reader will observe, that the present question is not, whether the internal proofs divines produce in favour of revelation be good or bad ; but whether any internal evidence is to be produced at all, *i. e.* whether the doctrines of any supposed revelation ought to be examin'd, in order to know whether they are reasonable, and worthy of a Divine original. And will any one, that has not a mind to forfeit all title to rationality and common sense, deny so plain a proposition? Lord Bolingbroke has the boldness not only to do this, but likewise to call this rational inquiry, *unnecessary, impertinent and profane.**

Our divines, 'tis true, exhort us (and very justly) to examine the internal evidence of scripture : but his Lordship says, “ if the result of that examination “ is not strictly confirmable to the doctrines they teach, they *damn* us for “ examining.”

* Vol. II. p. 212.

The fiery zealots of the church of Rome do indeed anathematize and damn all those who walk not within the narrow precincts of their communion, who examine religion by reason, and entertain doctrines different from them. Let such divines answer for themselves. But what has the pure word of God, and the true dispensers of it, to do with this? Is there no truth in revelation, because in some countries it has been grossly corrupted and blended with error? Are there no honest men, because we sometimes meet with designing villains? Is this true logic? May we not here justly retort his Lordship's own words upon himself, with which he insults over the great Dr. Clarke, "*In the name of God is this to prove? Do men who prove no better, deserve an answer, how much reputation soever they may have acquired?*"*

From pag. 274 to pag. 277, Vol. II. his Lordship gives us a continued declamation

* Vol. IV. p. 264.

against the internal evidence of scripture, unsupported by *any* argument. And therefore *quod gratis dictum, gratis negatur*, is all the reply I think it deserves.

In Vol. V. p. 334, "He cautions
 "divines" (whom, with a politeness equal
 to his judgment, he calls *orthodox bullies*)
 "to insist chiefly on the external proofs
 "of the divine authenticity of the scrip-
 "tures, and to pour forth on that head
 "all their stock of Hebrew, Syriac, Greek,
 "and Latin; but to dwell very little
 "on the internal marks of a divine cha-
 "racter: they might silence those per-
 "haps on the first kind of proof, by
 "their translations and commentaries,
 "whom they will never convince on the
 "second by fair reasoning."

How well this caution is grounded, the reader by this time may judge from what has been said. Conviction, without doubt, is not to be expected but by fair reasoning. But will any one presume to affirm, that the internal evidence of scripture is not
 to

to be minded? Is it an unfair way of reasoning to say the doctrines of any supposed revelation are to be examined, in order to know whether they are worthy of God? Lord Bolingbroke roundly tells us, it is *impertinent* and *profane* to make this examination. What therefore must we think of a writer who deals in such paradoxes and absurdities? Does he not himself deserve that title of *audacious and vain sophist*, with which he has grossly traduced the memory of the great and good Dr. Clark? And will it be impertinent, upon this occasion, to apply his Lordship's own words to himself, viz. " *Let writers learn to be less dogmatical, and readers to be less implicit.*" The necessity of this advice will strongly appear, when we consider that, notwithstanding the zeal our noble Viscount shews in depreciating the internal evidence of scripture, he has in express terms allowed this evidence, and so committed the most palpable contradiction. Let his Lordship's own words decide against him.

“ Tho’ I think (he says) the internal
 “ evidences of a divine revelation nei-
 “ ther are, nor can be, such positive
 “ proofs as they are pretended to be;
 “ yet *I am fully persuaded that reason ought*
 “ *to examine the inward character of a re-*
 “ *velation, as well as the outward testimony.*”
 —And his Lordship insists, “ that a con-
 “ formity to all we know of a Supreme
 “ Being, and of the law of our nature, to
 “ be so very essential to a revelation that
 “ pretends to come from God, that if any
 “ one thing repugnant to this knowledge
 “ be found in any history, or system of
 “ doctrine, they ought to be rejected,
 “ whatever proofs, external or internal,
 “ they may boast of a divine original.”*

The same concession is thus strongly
 made in p. 280 of the same volume. “ U-
 “ pon the whole (says his Lordship) let us
 “ suppose the historical and traditional
 “ authority, urged in proof of a reve-
 “ lation, to be carried as high as the na-

* Vol. II, p. 277, 278.

" ture of things will admit, on a concur-
 " rence of all the conditions necessary to
 " establish such a probability, as ought
 " to stand in lieu of certainty in every
 " other case, and as may induce us, in this
 " case, to believe even in instances that
 " are not at all conformable to general
 " experience; yet must we not receive it
 " for true, till we are sure, *on the most*
 " *careful examination and analysis*, that it
 " contains nothing unworthy of the ma-
 " jesty of the Supreme Being, nothing
 " inconsistent with the demonstrated
 " truths of natural religion."

Other instances may be produced to
 prove the noble Viscount has been guilty
 of downright inconsistency. By which
 it may appear, that tho' the beauties of
 his imagination and extensive learning
 command our admiration, yet we cannot
 always pay him the same respect on ac-
 count of his precision of judgment and
 fairness of reasoning. For thus his Lord-
 ship argues; " That the unity of God
 " was the original belief of mankind,
 " and

“ and polytheism and idolatry were cor-
 “ ruptions of this orthodox faith, is an
 “ opinion Cudworth seem'd to establish.
 “ This opinion, Lord Bolingbroke says,
 “ can be supported neither by sacred nor
 “ profane authority.”*

And yet this is expressly contradicted
 in Vol. V. page 309. “ Cudworth has
 “ endeavour'd to prove, many have
 “ thought, and *I* (says our noble Lord)
 “ *incline to think*, that the unity of a first
 “ intelligent cause was the original belief
 “ of mankind.” See how his Lordship
 in one place declares that he believes an
 opinion, which in another place he very
 adroitly confesses can be supported by no
 authority either sacred or profane.—
Risum teneatis amici?—Verum opere
in longo fas est obrepere somnum.—

’Tis indeed the general drift of his
 Lordship’s writings to bespatter the scrip-
 tures, to deny their divine authority, and
 to represent even their doctrines as absurd,
 immoral, and repugnant to the law of

* Vol. I. p. 299, &c. 8vo. edit.

nature. Notwithstanding this, the force of truth extorts confessions from him of a contrary nature. He allows the authority of the Bible, and its useful tendency. Let us hear his own words.

“ On the whole, it is, I hope, plain
 “ by this time, that, far from disbelieving
 “ the history of the Bible, I assert the au-
 “ thority of it, and endeavour to place
 “ it out of the reach of cavil.”*

Again; after having mention'd some abuses of religion in general by its various professors and sects, his Lordship says expressly of Christianity, “ that no
 “ religion ever appear'd in the world,
 “ whose natural tendency was so much
 “ directed to promote the peace and hap-
 “ piness of mankind.”† And again, in page 287. “ Christianity is founded on
 “ the universal law of nature. I will not
 “ say that Christianity is a republica-
 “ tion of it: but I will say, that the

* Vol. II. p. 215.

† Ibid. p. 286.

“ Gospel teaches the great and fundamen-
 “ tal principle of this law, universal be-
 “ nevolence; recommends the precepts
 “ of it, and commands the observation
 “ of them in particular instances occa-
 “ sionally; always supposes them, always
 “ enforces them, and makes the law of
 “ right reason a law, in every possible
 “ definition of the word, beyond all ca-
 “ vil.”

Again; “ Christianity, as it stands in
 “ the Gospel, contains not only a com-
 “ plete, but a very plain system of re-
 “ ligion.*” And to close all; “ In all cases
 “ (says our noble Lord) the Gospel of
 “ Christ is one continued lesson of the
 “ strictest morality, of justice, of benevo-
 “ lence, and of universal charity.”†

After such strong declarations in fa-
 vour of Christianity, is it not wonderful
 to see his Lordship objecting to the mo-

* Vol. II. p. 332.

† Vol. IV. p. 144.

ral duties of the Gospel, especially what our Saviour and St. Paul have taught us?

“ Certain duties (says his Lordship) in
 “ Christ’s sermon on the mount, and o-
 “ ther parts of the Gospel, seem fit e-
 “ nough for a religious sect, or order
 “ of men like the *Essenians*, but are by
 “ no means practicable in the general
 “ society of mankind. *To resist no injury,*
 “ *to take no care for to-morrow, to ne-*
 “ *glect providing for the common neces-*
 “ *saries of life, and to sell all to follow*
 “ *Christ*, might be properly exacted from
 “ those who were his companions, and
 “ his disciples in a stricter sense, like the
 “ scholars of *Pythagoras*, admitted with-
 “ in the curtain; but reason and expe-
 “ rience both show, that, consider’d as ge-
 “ neral duties, they are impracticable, in-
 “ consistent with natural instinct, as well
 “ as law, and quite destructive of so-
 “ ciety.”*

* Vol. II. p. 310.

G

But

But if these duties are rightly explained, according to the intention of the writer, the circumstances of the people to whom they were enjoined, and the common rules of criticism used in other cases, they will appear to be duties agreeable to the law of nature, and beneficial rather than destructive to society. Thus, *not to resist injuries*, which may imply no more than bearing some affronts, and studying to live peaceably in society, was an excellent caution to the first disciples of Christianity, who were to win over souls to the faith of Christ by all the engaging arts of mildness and good-nature. And as to *our taking no care for to-morrow*, the true meaning of this, is, that we should not be *anxiously solicitous* about to-morrow; for so the original word *μεριμνάτε* ought to be render'd. The sense therefore is, that we should not indulge such immoderate concern for the things of this life, as would unhinge the mind, and cause a distraction in its faculties, such as Virgil describes,

Ani-

*Animum nunc huc, nunc dividit illuc,
Et rapit in partes varias.—*

In like manner, *to sell all and follow Christ* was never designed as a duty incumbent upon all the profelytes to Christianity, but only proposed to some who were ardently desirous to be first preachers of the Gospel. And this was a matter of private christian friendship, for the better maintenance of our Saviour's new raised society.

In the same manner his Lordship misunderstands and misrepresents the writings of St. Paul. He accuses the divine apostle of teaching *a new Gospel*, and doctrines repugnant to the Gospel of Christ. The passage he produces, in support of this accusation, is very extraordinary.* In the 16th of Rom. v. 25. St. Paul (says Lord Bolingbroke) calls the Gospel he preach'd, *my Gospel*. The words of scripture are, *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my Gospel*,

* Vol. II. p. 341.

and the preaching of Jesus Christ, &c.—
Without entering into any dispute whether Mr. Lock's interpretation of the passage be right, which Lord Bolingbroke rejects; let common sense determine whether any thing more is understood by *according to my Gospel, &c.* than this, According to the Gospel which I preach, or the glad-tidings I bring, which Jesus Christ first preached, and communicated to me.

But the heaviest charge of our noble Lord, against the great apostle, is, “ That
“ he not only talks of his own Gospel in
“ contradistinction to that of Christ, but
“ likewise teaches several doctrines which
“ have no foundation in the Gospel of
“ Christ, nay, that are directly repugnant
“ to it.”* He instances in predestination,
and passive obedience. After saying the
Gospel of Paul is *unintelligible*, his Lordship adds, that “ where it is intelligible,
“ it is often absurd, or profane, or trifling.
“ Is not the doctrine of passive

* Vol. II. p. 347—351.

“ obedience, which he teaches, most in-
 “ telligibly absurd? is not that of ab-
 “ solute predestination most intelligibly
 “ profane? is not one of them repug-
 “ nant to common sense? is not the o-
 “ ther as repugnant to all the ideas of
 “ God’s moral perfections? would not
 “ either of them be sufficient to shake
 “ the credit even of Christ’s Gospel, if
 “ they were contain’d in it?”*

Such a dreadful imputation of pro-
 faneness and absurdity, one would natu-
 rally expect, should be founded upon
 the strictest reason and truth. But the
 charge is without any just foundation.
 Lord Bolingbroke takes it for granted, that
 St. Paul teaches these doctrines, without
 even referring to any chapter or verse.
 This, I think, is an instance, among ma-
 ny others, that he himself is guilty of
 that vain dogmatical assumption which
 his Lordship so frequently condemns in
 divines. Some weak enthusiasts and ar-

* Vol. II. p. 351.

bitrary rulers have indeed pretended to prove the doctrines of absolute predestination, and unlimited passive obedience, from the writings of St. Paul. But this pretension, in my judgment, is like that of the person who undertook to prove the *Salique* law of France out of holy writ. For which purpose he urged the 6th chapter of St. Matthew, v. 28. *Behold the lilies of the field* (which are the arms of France) *they toil not, neither do they spin.* Just so fantastic is the opinion of those who pretend to infer the doctrine of predestination from the 9th chapter, or any other part, of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. " He that will
 " (says the great Mr. Locke) with moderate attention, and indifference of mind,
 " read this ninth chapter, will see, that
 " what is said of God's exercising absolute power, according to the good pleasure of his will ~~is~~ relates only to nations, or
 " bodies politic of men incorporated in
 " civil societies, which feel the effects of
 " it only in prosperity or calamity they
 " meet with in this world; *but extends*

“ *not to their eternal state in another world,*
 “ *consider’d as particular persons, wherein*
 “ *they stand each man by himself upon*
 “ *his own bottom, and shall so answer*
 “ *separately at the day of judgment.*
 “ *They may be punish’d here with their*
 “ *fellow-creatures as part of a sinful na-*
 “ *tion, and that be but temporal chas-*
 “ *tisement for their good, and yet be ad-*
 “ *vanced to eternal life and bliss in the*
 “ *world to come.**”

Nor is the doctrine of passive obedience less unscriptural, how much soever some pretend to infer it from the 13th chapter to the Romans. The plain sense of that chapter is to inculcate the duty of obedience to civil government in general, and that under the express notion of its being calculated for the good of society. For (says St. Paul) *rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil: and—He is the minister of God to thee*

* Vid. Locke's Paraphrase on the Epistle to the Romans.

for Good: which words are a direct contradiction to the doctrine of passive obedience, as that implies subjection even to the worst of tyrants.

Let therefore every impartial reader judge, whether Lord Bolingbroke does not grossly violate the plain sense of scripture, and whether the expression his Lordship borrows from St. Jerom may not justly be applied to himself; “ He hawls
“ the word of God to serve his purpose
“ [*trahere scripturas*]” by interpreting St. Paul and our Saviour’s doctrine so perversely.

But his Lordship (however strange it may seem) makes due atonement for misrepresenting the doctrine of St. Paul. For he expressly says, “ This apostle himself does not, I think, prescribe any
“ thing directly opposite to the law of
“ nature, as the command of God to
“ man.*” Which is a flat contradiction to what he had asserted before.

* Vol. IV. p. 144.

Enough

Enough has been said to shew how strangely our noble Lord has fallen into self-contradictions and inconsistencies. The reader may likewise observe, that his Lordship excels more in pompous declamation than in close and fair reasoning. I shall add some further remarks in confirmation of this.

“ Genuine theism (says his Lordship)
 “ could at no time be confined to any one
 “ people—it must have been at different
 “ times in different places discover’d, es-
 “ tablish’d, corrupted, lost, and renew’d,
 “ according to the vicissitude of human
 “ affairs.*”

Who says it was confin’d?—But upon his Lordship’s own argument, if true theism was corrupted, and lost, where is the absurdity or impropriety of God’s finding means to renew it? and is not this one principal reason why revelation was given?

His Lordship finds fault with Christia-

* Vol. II. p. 216.

nity, because (he says) “ it has not corrected the manners of men, but on the contrary has served to determine them to violate the very law of nature, and has open’d a new scene of mischief wherever it has prevail’d.*”

True Christianity never had this effect; nor is it conceivable, that a religion which inculcates the utmost purity of heart, mildness of temper, and integrity of life, should ever be the source of mischief. ’Tis blind prejudice, and unruly passion, let loose from the restraints of reason as well as revelation, that impel mankind to do mischief to one another. Here therefore the noble Lord confounds the corruptions of Christianity with the genuine doctrines and tendency of it. But this argument is downright sophistical, and will equally conclude against natural religion as well as revelation. His Lordship allows, that “ natural religion (as well as “ reveal’d) has been corrupted and shook “ to the foundations of it, by artificial the- “ ology.*”—What then? Is there therefore no truth in natural religion, because

* Vol. II. p. 296.

† Vol. IV. p. 256.

it has been corrupted? Lord Bolingbroke allows there is, and professes himself a great advocate for it. Why then may there not be true revelation, notwithstanding it has been corrupted by artificial theology? And if Christianity has not in all places, and in every instance, corrected the manners of men, the same may be said of natural religion. But the question is, whether the assistance of revelation, superadded to the light of nature, is not more likely to reform mankind, than natural religion alone? The conclusiveness of this argument is evident, if we only suppose revelation possible.

His Lordship adds, "Revelation, if true, must have forced conviction, and taken away even the possibility of doubt."* But why so? must the divine Being, in order to make men religious, destroy the very nature of religion, which is founded upon human liberty and freedom of choice? Revelation has evidence sufficient to gain conviction, by the spontaneous exercise of reason; but experience

* Vol. II. p. 259, 260.

shews, that the clearest truths even of nature may be rejected, by the prejudices and passions of inconsiderate and obstinate men.

“ Divines (says our noble Lord) cannot bear that the will, or the existence of God should be deduced from his works.*”

This is not only a false but an audacious assertion, and contrary to matter of fact. Let the whole tribe of theologians answer for themselves. In all my little intercourse with books, I never met with one divine that was unwilling to deduce the will and existence of God from his works. Dr. Clark, tho’ he attempted to throw new light upon the argument *à priori*, very strongly allows and enforces the argument *à posteriori*. But his Lordship deals much in general charges, without ever observing the philosopher’s maxim, *Qui bene distinguit, bene docet*. And thus he tells us, “ The far greatest part of mankind are invincibly ignorant of the first principles of Christianity, without

* Vol. II. p. 297.

“ the knowledge of which, and without
 “ faith in which, they are all condemn’d
 “ to eternal punishment.*”

None sure but that church which fulminates anathemas to all out of her pale, thinks so unworthily of God, and so uncharitably of the Heathen world, as to consign them over to eternal punishment for being invincibly ignorant of Christianity. Pure Christianity itself entertains no such malignant sentiment. St. Peter observes, that *God is no respecter of persons ; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*† And St. Paul says, *when the gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law ; these having not the law, are a law unto themselves ; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.*‡

The same undistinguishing judgment his Lordship shews in his reasoning about

* Vol. IV. p. 22.

† Acts x. 34, 35.

‡ Rom. ii. 14, 15.

a future state. “ I do not say (he observes) that to believe a future state is to believe a vulgar error ; but this I say, it cannot be demonstrated by reason : it is not in the nature of it capable of demonstration, and no one ever return’d that irremediable way to give us assurance of the fact.—They who adopted this doctrine before the coming of Christ had no better authority for it, than that of the Egyptian priests, Greek poets, and Pythagorean and Platonic hypotheses.*”

Suppose a future state cannot (strictly speaking) be *demonstrated*, yet is there no *probability* of it from reason ? and is not probability to be admitted where certainty cannot be had ? Does Cicero, when he speaks of the soul’s immortality, speak without any reason ? and will no efforts of reason induce a probable expectation of it ? Revelation has without doubt made the belief of a future state more certain than before : it has indeed sanctified this doctrine ; it has manifested, illustrated, and confirm’d a truth, which

* Vol. IV. p. 349, 350.

is of the utmost importance to all the human species, and which the ancient philosophers and poets had a very obscure and doubtful opinion of. Does not revelation therefore, on account of this glorious display of life and immortality, deserve our highest respect? does it not at least deserve to be treated with more civility than our noble philosopher vouchsafes to shew it? But his Lordship loves to indulge his fancy in aspersing the oracles of God; his eloquence frequently consists of railing instead of reasoning, and he substitutes the vilest misrepresentations for genuine scripture. Thus he tells us, “ The God of Moses, and the God
 “ of Paul, is not an amiable Being. The
 “ God of the first is partial, unjust, and
 “ cruel; delights in blood; commands
 “ assassinations, massacres, and exter-
 “ minations of people. The God of
 “ the second elects some of his creatures
 “ to salvation, and predestinates others
 “ to damnation, even in the womb of
 “ their mother.*”

* Vol. V. p. 217.

All this is boldly asserted without any proof, and ought therefore to be look'd upon as mere calumny. If, in the former charge, his Lordship alludes to God's selecting the Jewish people, and extirpating the Canaanites; why is the God of Moses partial in this? only because he appointed one people to be instruments of good to another; nay, to be instrumental to the good of many. And is not this constantly done in the daily administration of human affairs, and the natural course of providence? And why is the God of Moses represented unjust and cruel? only because he order'd very wicked nations to be punish'd for their wickedness; as is plain from *Deuteronomy*, chap. ix. ver. 4, 5. and the general account of the Mosaic history.

The charge against St. Paul is likewise no less false than scurrilous. That great apostle never taught a word of the absurd and impious doctrine of predestination. This I have shewn above; and Lord Bolingbroke might as well have deduced this doctrine from the writings of *Livy*,

Livy, or his friend *Tacitus*, as from any writings of *St. Paul*.

With the same spirit of truth and candor does his Lordship assert, that the law of *Moses* excluded the principle of benevolence. “The whole tenor (says he) of the Jewish laws took them out of all moral obligations to the rest of mankind, and determined them to have no benevolence for any who were not Jews.*”

How true this is, let any one judge from the following passages of scripture : *If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee, lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help him.† The stranger that dwelleth with you, shall be as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself.‡*—Again; *Moses* exhorts the *Israelites* to benevolence, from the example of *God* himself,

* Vol. V. p. 357, &c.

† Exod. xxiii. 4, 5.

‡ Levit. xix. 34.

who doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger.—Again; If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.†*

From these gross misrepresentations of the sacred writings, would not any one imagine Lord Bolingbroke had never read them, or at least not with so much attention as is usually paid to a Heathen author?

His Lordship winds up the whole of his objections against the scriptures in one severe invective, with which I shall close these animadversions.

“ There are (says Lord Bolingbroke)
 “ gross defects and palpable falsehoods in
 “ almost every page of the scriptures,
 “ and the whole tenor of them is such as
 “ no man, who acknowledges a supreme
 “ all-perfect Being, can believe to be
 “ his word.

* Deut. x. 18, 19.

† Prov. xxv. 21.

This he pretends to prove in p. 367 of Vol. V. to the end of the book. All which pages contain no argument, but a mere continued declamation and ludicrous account of the Mosaic history. In answer to which I shall only observe, that the most important truths may be ridiculed, and the grossest errors made plausible, by the help of a lively imagination, which, every one knows, our noble Lord enjoy'd to an uncommon degree of perfection. Whether his judgment bore any proportion to his fancy, appears sufficiently from his writings.

Here I will conclude, having said enough, I think, to shew, that Lord Bolingbroke was a fine declaimer, but a very bad reasoner; that he has grossly misrepresented and abused the holy scriptures; that he has been guilty of most palpable contradictions; and, notwithstanding all his objections, that the internal evidence, or usefulness of revelation, is an undoubted mark of its divine original. I shall finish the whole with an excellent passage from a modern writer, extremely apposite to the subject of these papers.

“ Upon

“ Upon the very same grounds that I
 “ am convinced of the truth of religion
 “ in general, I am so of the truth of
 “ Christianity. The good of the world
 “ is greatly promoted by it.—Its simpli-
 “ city may have been disguised; its in-
 “ tention perverted; its doctrines misre-
 “ presented; and conclusions drawn,
 “ suiting rather the interest or ambition
 “ of the expositor, than the directions
 “ of the text: but when I resort to the
 “ rule itself; when I find it asserting, that
 “ *the whole of my duty is to love God above*
 “ *all things, and my neighbour as myself;*
 “ *to live always mindful by whom I am sent*
 “ *into, and preserved in the world, and al-*
 “ *ways disposed to do in it all the good in my*
 “ *power;* I can no more doubt, whether
 “ this is the voice of my Creator, than I
 “ can doubt, whether it must be his will,
 “ that when he has made me a reason-
 “ able creature, I should act like one.*”

* Essays on the employment of time.



F I N I S.

